

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OFA-01 IO-10 DLOS-04 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CG-00 DOTE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01

ACDA-05 TRSE-00 AID-05 /095 W
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R 141129Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7480

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 13860

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EFIS, TH, VS

SUBJECT: RGSVN SEIZES THAI FISHING BOATS

SUMMARY: FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE TAKEOVER, THE
SAIGON GOVERNMENT HAS SEIZED THAI FISHING BOATS, IMPRISONING
THE CREWMEN. THE RTG IS WATCHING TO SEE HOW THE NEW
VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT HANDLES THE MATTER. END SUMMARY

1. TEN THAI TRAWLERS WERE FISHING OFF OBI ISLAND JULY 7.
THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT ATTACKED THEM WITH MACHINE
GUNS AND GRENADE LAUNCHERS, WOUNDING A NUMBER OF CREWMEN
AND SEIZING FIVE FISHING BOATS, ACCORDING TO RECENT THAI
NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS. THE VIETNAMESE REPORTEDLY CAPTURED SOME
100 THAI FISHERMEN AND TOWED THEIR VESSELS TO KIEN GIANG.

2. THEP THEWAKUN, CHIEF OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION
OF THE RTG FOREIGN MINISTRY, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT
THE FISHERMEN WERE LARGELY TO BLAME FOR THEIR MISFORTUNE.
HE SAID THEY HAD DROPPED ANCHOR CLOSE TO THE ISLAND AND
WERE NAPPING. IF THEY WANTED TO STOP FOR AWHILE, THEY
OUGHT TO HAVE DONE SO FAR FROM LAND SO AS TO AVOID
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DISPUTES, HE MAINTAINED.

3. THEP NOTED THAT THIS WAS THE FIRST INCIDENT OF THIS TYPE SINCE THE CHANGE OF REGIMES IN SVN. THE RTG DOES NOT KNOW HOW THE NEW SAIGON GOVERNMENT WILL DEAL WITH THE QUESTION OF THE RELEASE OF THE BOATS AND CREWMEN, BUT INTENDS TO WAIT AND SEE. HE SAW SIGNIFICANCE IN THE FACT THAT THE RGSVN CONTINUES TO DETAIN OTHER THAI FISHERMEN THAT THE GVN PREVIOUSLY CAPTURED.

4. PRIOR TO THE OBI ISLAND INCIDENT, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE RED CROSS HAD INFORMED THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT THE FISHERMEN CAPTURED EARLIER TOTALLED 75, AND WERE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE. TO DATE, THE ICRC HAS NOT RESPONDED TO A THAI REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

5. COMMENT: THAI FISHING ACTIVITY OFF THE COAST OF VIETNAM HAS TROUBLED THAI-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS FREQUENTLY IN THE PAST. SEIZURES OF BOATS AND THE KILLING OF A THAI FISHERMAN IN 1974 RESULTED IN THE VISIT HERE LAST SEPTEMBER OF THE GVN FOREIGN MINISTER TO DISCUSS THAI PROPOSALS FOR A JOINT FISHING ZONE. THE TWO SIDES DID NOT REACH AGREEMENT, HOWEVER. COMPLICATING THE SITUATION, THAI FISHING VESSELS HAVE OFTEN BEEN USED FOR SMUGGLING GOODS INTO AND OUT OF VIETNAM. IN ADDITION, THEY ARE NOW SMUGGLING--FOR AN EXORBITANT FEE--VIETNAMESE OUT OF DELTA PORTS.

6. WITH THE INCONCLUSIVE PRG-RTG TALKS IN MAY OVER THE DISPOSITION OF GVN PLANES AND VESSELS IN THAILAND AS BACKGROUND, THE CAPTURED FISHERMEN CAN POSSIBLY PLAY SOME ROLE IN THE POLITICAL BARGAINING THAT MIGHT EVENTUALLY OCCUR BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. AT THE MINIMUM, THE THAI WILL WATCH THE RGSVN HANDLING OF THE MATTER ATTENTIVELY AS A SIGN OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THAILAND. MEANWHILE, THE POLICY HERE SEEMS TO BE TO WAIT AND SEE.

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